

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH JIM GARAMONE, AFIS, IN THE PENTAGRAM
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Perry strives to protect readiness, invest in people

by Jim Garamone
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Investing in readiness, people and weapon systems is at the top of priorities for the fiscal 1995 defense budget, said Defense Secretary William Perry.

In an interview, Perry said DoD will not compromise on readiness, and personnel and their quality of life are key. "I truly believe we have the best, most professional armed forces this country has ever had," Perry said. "They are the best in the world."

His principal objective is to maintain this quality and professionalism through the resources placed in force structure and operations and maintenance.

"The guidance we sent to the services specified in the first paragraph that readiness of the force was the number one priority," Perry said. "Any other guidance could be subordinated to that if the services thought it necessary."

The services' budget request reflected this guidance. As a result, operations and maintenance funds rose even though the number of personnel dropped. This means more steaming hours, more sorties, more time driving tanks as well as more money to keep equipment maintained. "This will directly affect readiness," Perry said.

Perry is aware many servicemembers perceive an erosion of benefits, and he is working to preserve the benefits in the budget. "We really want to support our people, but we have some limits on how we can do that," he said. "On the positive side, the budget does include a pay increase. It does include additional support for child care, improvements in bachelor housing, and it does include an increase in morale and welfare funds. The budget isn't perfect, but it's an improvement

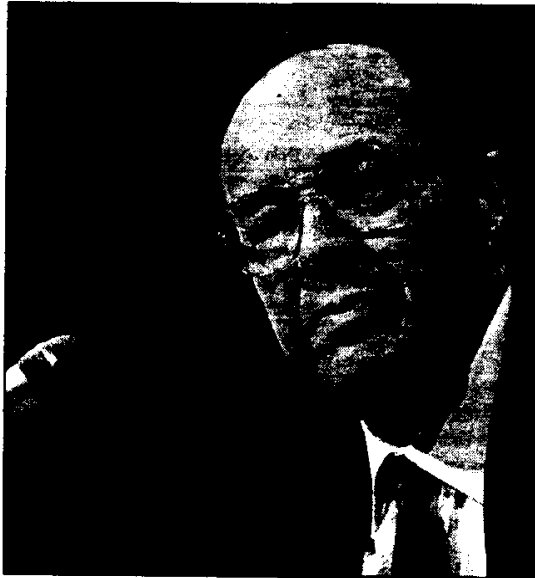
over what we've been having, and I think we're moving in the right direction."

Perry believes Congress will pass this budget and that the budget has struck the right balance between the drawdown and readiness. "The 1994 budget introduced the Bottom-up Review, and we basically got what we wanted from Congress," Perry said. "I think that will be true in 1995, too, not because Congress is willing to write blank checks, but because we have a strategy for the budget and a rationale for it and the dollars flow from that."

Investing in people is important to DoD, and that is why the budget request calls for \$400 million in fiscal 1995. "Any organization, especially the military, needs to bring in young people at the bottom, because we are not planning for today's or next year's contingencies. We're planning for contingencies 10 years and 15 years in the future. How many years does it take to train a battalion or brigade commander? So actions we take today will affect the quality and readiness of the forces in the future."

Investment in technology will also be protected in the budget, and this too is an investment in the future. Such investment "means secretaries of defense in the future will have the right technical base to develop their weapon systems," Perry said. "When I was in the Pentagon in the late 1970s, I was developing the weapon systems that were used in the early 1990s during Desert Storm. There's a long time cycle, and we have to invest in science and technology just as we have to invest in recruiting."

Perry kept science and technology funds high by cutting procurement. With the drawdown, the United States has surplus weapon stocks, and the military can live off those for at least a few years. "The procurement budget starts going up again in two years as we run



(photo by Chester Simpson)

William Perry, secretary of defense
out of inventory," Perry said.

Keeping industrial capacity is another priority. In the most controversial decision, DoD will build another Seawolf attack submarine to keep the industry going. The United States also doesn't need new tanks. "What we're doing with tanks is keeping the line together by modifying and upgrading the M-1 tank," Perry said. "That will give us a more capable weapon system and keep our industrial base alive."

Finally, Perry incorporated recommendations of the Defense Performance Review in the budget. "The review called for a reform of the procurement system. We're already moving in that direction, and we've folded some of our initiatives in with the national effort. The people we have (buying equipment) are very good, capable and dedicated. But the system we encumber them with is terrible. We have to take the handcuffs off our people and let them use their judgment. It will save the taxpayers' money, and we'll get better equipment to the field sooner."